

I'm proud of my daughter for many reasons. One to add to my list is that she won a book for good grades last June although she wasn't keen on reading her prize. School was out and Harry Potter beckoned. When I read the jacket, I realized that "Keeping the Lakes' Way: Reburial and the Re-creation of a Moral World among an Invisible People" by Paula Pryce was worth my time. Pryce is a daughter of Castlegar. She attended Stanley Humphries and Selkirk College. She participated in a Canada World Youth trip to Bolivia. Her book is derived from her masters thesis, earned at the University of Toronto.

Pryce begins by remembering a West Kootenay childhood anomaly. She has no memory of a local First Nations presence. After visiting Bolivia, other regions of British Columbia, and critical reflection, she realized how incongruous that absence was. When she probed gently, she read that the region had never been occupied by any First Nations group, that history began with the arrival of Europeans, that the local First Nations were assimilated by the Interior Salish Skoyelpi of the Colville Reserve, the Interior Salish of the Penticton Reserve or the Interior Salish Kutenai of the East Kootenay.

Since arriving in Castlegar, I'd heard the same. I'd determined that Interior Salish is as broadly descriptive of a culture as the term European. My father would never have described himself as European. He was a Scot. He was leery of the English, the Welsh, and the Irish. And as for those on the continent, his cultural and genetic links had ceased with Viking raids. Following my father's logic, because the territory once solely occupied by the Interior Salish is as vast and as varied as western Europe, Interior Salish cultural differentiation would be expected not exceptional.

Pryce's deeper probing followed an excavation in 1989, near Vallican. A forest service road was being built and body remains were unearthed. These bodies had been buried not only in a distinctly non-European manner, but differently than other Interior Salish cultures. These disinterments were irrefutable evidence of Interior Salish Sinixt or Lakes people presence. The ancestors of the buried had dispersed, although they still described themselves as Sinixt, distinct from other Interior Salish. Sinixt blockaded the forest service road and claimed the bodies of their ancestors for reburial on traditional lands.

Pryce has labouriously compiled their story. She remains, she admitted when I called her, uncomfortable telling their story. She distinguishes the Sinixt culture and history from that of other Interior Salish. She explores the relationship of the Sinixt culture with time and space. Her most important point is that a culture, insofar as it is not extirpated, continues to evolve. She strongly warns us not to expect the Sinixt or any First Nations to live as they did one hundred or one thousand years ago. We cannot expect all First Nations to hold a common opinion or adhere to a common set of beliefs. We can expect, in fact it is a right, that people of different backgrounds contribute to defining and participating in contemporary society to the extent that they are fairly recognized and included.

This is the tragedy of the Sinixt. Pryce describes how the Federal Government declared the Sinixt extinct. Thus their claims to historic lands evaporated and the incorrect assumption that there were no First Nations people in the West Kootenay prior to European contact precipitated. Pryce condenses truth and dispels falsehood.

She asks implicitly, "Will we lobby to rescind the extinct status assigned to the Sinixt and include them in our society?"